

# **Project Outline: *Dancing to Connect***

## **Project Summary**

Battery Dance Company and Drastic Action, two dance companies from New York who cooperatively presented the internationally acclaimed *Dances for the Blue House* in Germany in 2006, will lead intensive dance workshops with high school students in Freiburg, Germany, in summer 2007. With guidance from ten American teaching artists and their artistic directors, 100 students will create choreography based on the theme of ***Dancing to Connect***, culminating in performances in the Large Hall of Freiburg's City Theater on Tuesday, July 17.

Tolerance, integration and intercultural understanding comprise the thematic core of the workshops, embedded into the choreography and addressed while building dance skills. The *lingua franca* (English) and the universal languages of dance and music build communicative bridges among students who represent diverse populations, immigrant and native, high-performing and educationally-challenged, Christian and Muslim. Likewise, the American professionals cross bridges in mentoring their youthful German charges.

Dance facilitates self-respect, an important pre-requisite for developing tolerant behaviour. During the workshops the students explore their own feelings and sensations, some new and surprising. They relate to each other and to the teaching artists across generational, gender, ethnic, religious and social differences, converting their explorations into physical expression. The discovery of the *self* goes hand in hand with the discovery of the *other*. Though this profound process would be reason enough for engaging in this project, the public will also share in the experience through performances by the young participants in Freiburg's City Theater as the culminating event of the theatre season.

The five participating Freiburg schools have been chosen to represent the broadest cross-section of educational levels available to German students. This wide range presents an ideal subject for evaluation and assessment by professors and students of Freiburg's Teachers College. The results will be documented and form the basis for future program development both in Freiburg and elsewhere in Germany, the European Union and the United States.

## **Project Details**

### **Dates:**

Workshops: Monday, July 9 – Monday, July 16, total of 35 hours

Performances: Tuesday, July 17, matinee and evening shows

### **Participating Schools:**

Kepler Gymnasium (lead school)  
Berthold Gymnasium  
Staudinger Comprehensive School  
Pestalozzi Realschule  
Emil Gött Hauptschule

### **Teaching Artists:**

10 members of the Battery Dance Company and Drastic Action from New York City

### **Project Leadership Team:**

**Project Manager U.S.:** Jonathan Hollander, Artistic Director, Battery Dance Company

**Project Manager Germany:** Alfred Rogoll, Arts Journalist, Badische Zeitung

**Project Educational Director:** Wolfgang Börchardt, Teacher, Kepler Gymnasium, Freiburg

**Non-profit Host Institution:** Carl-Schurz-Haus, Eva Mänske, Director  
**Educational Consultants:** Marita Schocker v. Ditmuth & Mechtild Hesse, Professors,  
Pedagogical College Freiburg

**Facilitators:**

Herr Rolf Behrens, Headmaster, Kepler Gymnasium & Acting Principal, Freiburg High Schools  
Kirsten Gerstner, Cultural Affairs Specialist, U.S. Consulate General, Frankfurt  
Thomas Hauser, Editor-in-Chief, Badische Zeitung  
Achim Könneke, Director, Cultural Affairs Department, City of Freiburg  
Barbara Mundel, Intendant, Freiburg City Theater  
Graham Smith, Choreographer, PVC, Freiburg

## **BACKGROUND**

Dances for the Blue House, July 18 – August 6, 2006

A sixteen-year-old forgoes the holiday of his dreams in South Africa because of a dance project. Instead of relaxing on vacation in an exotic land, he demands of himself a maximum of concentration, energy and teamwork in an extended extra-curricular school project. He is one of 100 students in his town who are teamed up in groups of 20, developing choreography. His mentors are professional artists from New York's *Battery Dance Company*. He wants to be on stage and to realize the culmination of two weeks of hard work when students from three different schools perform the *Dances for the Blue House* at the beginning of the summer holidays.

The project described here took place in July and August 2006 in Freiburg and Breisach in order to bring attention to the work of the *Förderverein Ehemaliges Jüdisches Gemeindehaus e.V.* The project led two New York City-based choreographers, Jonathan Hollander and Aviva Geismar, along with the teaching artists of their companies Battery Dance Company and Drastic Action, to three high schools in Freiburg: Lessing Realschule and Förderschule, Theodor-Heuss-Gymnasium and Kepler-Gymnasium. The ten artists from New York, joined by two colleagues from Australia and Russia, met with students daily for five hour sessions over a period of eight days. The students became dance-makers, devising five short dance works that they performed before fellow pupils, parents and teachers of their respective schools. The grand finale consisted of three performances for large public audiences in Breisach in which the efforts of the three schools were framed by dances performed by the professional dance companies. Detailed accounts were given by the newspaper *Badische Zeitung* and the local press, followed by reports in *Südwestrundfunk* (a TV and radio channel) as well as the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and across the U.S. in *Hadassah Magazine*. The occasion brought U.S. Ambassador William R. Timken from Berlin to Breisach, joined by VIPs and guests from Switzerland, France, Israel, the U.S., the U.K. and Canada, and a large contingent from the local region. *Closer Than It Appears, Dances for the Blue House*, an art book of photographs by Breisach-based Ari Nahor is being published to memorialize the project. The great success and the lasting impact on all involved provide encouragement to continue expanding the work in new forms.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### ***Dancing to Connect: July 8 – 18, 2007***

***Dancing to Connect*** builds on the success as well as the lessons learned from its earlier version. Promoted by the lead German and American partners of the 2006 project, Kepler-Gymnasium and Battery Dance Company, joined by the Carl-Schurz-Haus and the Pedagogical College in Freiburg and with encouragement of the Koerber-Stiftung, ***Dancing to Connect*** takes the essence of cooperation to a new level. The title of the 2007 version is intended to be taken literally. It will proceed in accord with the philosophy of educating the whole child – also known as holistic pedagogy – and expands into an interdisciplinary approach connecting very different areas:

- **Tolerance, integration and intercultural understanding** comprise the thematic core of the workshops, arising naturally while building dance skills and creating choreography. The *lingua franca* (English) and the universal languages of dance and music build communicative bridges. Dance facilitates self-respect, an important pre-requisite for developing tolerant behavior. During the workshops the students explore their own feelings and sensations, some new and surprising. They relate to each other and to the teaching artists across generational, gender, ethnic, religious and social differences, converting their explorations into physical expression. The discovery of the *self* goes hand in hand with the discovery of the *other*.
- In **Dances for the Blue House**, participants hailed from five continents and over 20 nations including members of three world religions, Christianity, Judaism and Islam. This heterogeneity reflects everyday life in German schools. Both Kepler Gymnasium and Lessing Schools have special classes for students with migrant backgrounds and many of them were involved in the last dance project. ***Dancing to Connect*** will go forward with the effort to involve an even broader cross-section of students.
- ***DANCING TO CONNECT*** sets an example of how to implement what Helmut Rau, Baden-Württemberg Minister for education, cultural affairs and sports, expressed in a letter to all teachers in September 2006: *“The integration of children and adolescents with migrant backgrounds is a vital requirement for educational policy. It is happening locally in communes, child-care institutions, schools and clubs. . . . The value of multilingualism and cultural diversity is a resource for the social and economical development of our society.”*
- The integration of differently-abled students, students with different learning styles and abilities, was a focus of the project in 2006 and will continue in 2007. Integrating students with this special profile into daily classroom life is the goal of every school. ***Dancing to Connect*** actively pursues this goal and finds dance and music to be ideal media for such an endeavour.
- The interconnections that ***Dancing to Connect*** promotes are multi-layered:
  1. Professional performing artists with students
  2. Veteran high school teachers with teachers-in-training
  3. Americans with Germans
  4. Professors at a teachers’ college with teachers of high school
  5. Differently-abled students with gymnasium students
  6. Foreign-born students with native Germans
- **The connection to the dancers from New York** proved to be especially enriching. *“Using dance to foster intercultural understanding”* is the central tenet of Jonathan Hollander and his Battery Dance Company. Hollander and his company members have engaged in arts and educational projects around the world for more than 30 years in such places as Australia, Japan, Cambodia,

Vietnam, Taiwan, India, Morocco, Israel, Jordan, Tunisia and numerous countries of the European Union. Battery Dance Company members, who are both performers and teaching artists of the first rank, bring with them a maximum of experience in dance pedagogy. Battery Dancers' methods allow the students to take ownership of their work, giving them the tools as well as the license to think and act creatively. The fact that most of the students who participated in *Dances for the Blue House* were previously untrained in dance, and had no experience with choreography, makes their results all the more astonishing. Starting from an introduction into the fundamental elements of dance, students are given exercises that facilitate the creation of their own movement phrases, starting from the most elementary and building in sophistication over the course of the workshops. They exchange ideas within smaller teams regarding the selection of appropriate music and themes. These choices merge organically with the movement and evolve into choreography. In the workshops the students experience the professionalism of the teaching artists, who demand their intense dedication and effort. On stage they experience themselves embedded in professional performances of the dancers from New York City, before a large audience of their peers and families as well as the general public. This becomes an opportunity for all to shine and to enjoy the esprit de corps across all of the different levels and connections.

(cf. <http://www.batterydanceco.com/images/BDC%20group.pdf>, especially page 3).

**Linking the United States and Europe** has an especially lasting effect for all involved. The students come into contact with a U.S. that was previously not known to them. They experience the so-called "melting pot" of New York City first hand. The dancers who came in summer 2006 were originally from Barbados, South Africa, Florida, Oregon and Serbia. The conditions under which they live in New York are not easy, but it is the best place for them to be able to grow as dancers and artists. Every dancer has his or her own picture of the U.S. Of course, the mutual exchange does not stay limited to the workshops. The students meet the *Teaching Artists* in their free time and also often stay in contact after the project has ended. An attached excerpt of a letter from "Patricia," a student of the Kepler Gymnasium, demonstrates this bonding phenomenon.

- **English** is the means of communication, by which all participants can interact. It is used as a *lingua franca* with which contributors of different nations, cultures and religions work together, for example, to create choreography together.
- **Music** is communication without words. It enables an approach to, and expression of feelings. While devising their choreography, the students receive insight into very different styles of music, which are often beyond their own, often limited, listening habits. Music is one of the bases of modern dance, in which the participants convert sounds into movement.
- **Dance** is initially the examination of oneself. It allows for new ways of becoming aware of the self and one's own body like no other sporting activity and can open paths to a more conscious self-esteem. The physical experience of dance and creative self-expression, however, only becomes meaningful in a context of harmony with others. Everyone is an element of the group that complements itself and in which everyone is dependent on all other group members.
- **Perspective for Europe:** The fundamental idea of 'interculturality' in *DANCING TO CONNECT* makes the project an ideal framework to facilitate the European Idea. The aim is to build up networks in the Freiburg area, as well as to realise co-operations with other educational institutions including tertiary establishments. This will give the project additional sustainability and opportunities for continued evolution. *Battery Dance Company* with its European and global experience is an ideal partner to promote this eventuality.

*Dancing to Connect* will be implemented in July, 2007, with culminating performances given at the Freiburg State Theatre on July 17. Support is anticipated from educational and cultural offices of the City of Freiburg, the U.S. Embassy and Consulate General in Berlin and Frankfurt, and Koerber-Stiftung and other corporate and foundation sponsors, with the local newspaper of the region, the *Badische Zeitung*,

serving as media sponsor. As in 2006, the students and their families will not be asked to pay a fee for the project, as this might be a burden for certain families and the organizing principle of the project is accessibility to all.

The participating schools for ***Dancing to Connect*** represent the widest cross-section of academic and social levels: Gymnasien (gymnasiums): Kepler-Gymnasium <http://www.kepler.fr.bw.schule.de/> and Berthold-Gymnasium <http://informatik.berthold-gymnasium.de/>, Gesamtschulen (high school, comprehensive school) Staudinger-Gesamtschule <http://www.staudi.fr.schule-bw.de/>, Realschulen: Pestalozzi- Realschule <http://www.pestalozzi.homepage.t-online.de/> and Hauptschule: Emil-Gött-Schule. Professors at the Pedagogical College will utilize ***Dancing to Connect*** as a model project, surveying the students and teachers before, during and after the project for analytical and evaluative purposes. A report will be issued at the end of the project to guide future arts-education programs in Germany.

Sponsors: City of Freiburg, U.S. Mission to Germany, Citibank Privatkunden AG & Co KgaA, Stadt Theater Freiburg, Price Waterhouse Coopers-Stiftung, Badische Zeitung, Körber Stiftung